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SF PERUSALS

Death Defying Acts

Woody Allen
"Central Park West"

David Mamet
"An Interview"

Elaine May
"Hotline"

3 One-Act Comedies

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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Presents
"DEATH DEFYING ACTS"

Woody Allen	David Mamet	Elaine May
"Central Park West"	"An Interview"	"Hotline"

3 One-Act Comedies

VARIETY ARTS THEATRE

Under the Direction of Ben Sprecher and William P. Miller

JULIAN SCHLOSSBERG AND JEAN DOUMANIAN
PRESENT

LINDA LAVIN
DEBRA MONK
PAUL GUILFOYLE

DEATH DEFYING ACTS

WOODY ALLEN
"CENTRAL PARK WEST"

DAVID MAMET
"AN INTERVIEW"

ELAINE MAY
"HOTLINE"

3 NEW ONE-ACT COMEDIES

AASIF MANDVI PAUL O'BRIEN TARA T. SIGHOR

AND

GERRY BECKER

SCENIC DESIGN
ROBIN WAGNER

COSTUMES
JANE GREENWOOD

LIGHTING
PETER KACZOROWSKI

SOUND
JAN NEBOZENKO

PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR
STEVEN ZWEIGBAUM

CASTING
STUART HOWARD/ AMY SCHECTER

PRESS REPRESENTATIVE
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GENERAL MANAGEMENT
RICHARD FRANKEL PROD./ MARC ROUTH

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS
LETTY ARONSON MEYER ACKERMAN

DIRECTED BY

MICHAEL BLAKEMORE

CAST

(in order of appearance)

AN INTERVIEW

The Attorney .....PAUL GUILFOYLE
The Attendant .....GERRY BECKER

HOTLINE

Ken .....GERRY BECKER
Dr. Russell .....PAUL GUILFOYLE
Marty..... PAUL O'BRIEN
Dorothy .....LINDA LAVIN
Delivery Boy .....AASIF MANDVI

FIFTEEN MINUTE INTERMISSION.

CENTRAL PARK WEST

Phyllis .....DEBRA MONK
Carol .....LINDA LAVIN
Howard .....GERRY BECKER
Sam .....PAUL GUILFOYLE
Juliet .....TARI T. SIGNOR

STANDBYS

Standbys and understudies never substitute for listed players unless a specific announcement for the appearance is made at the time of the performance.

For Dorothy, Carol, Phyllis—Lauren Klein; for the Attorney, Dr. Russell, Sam—Chuck Stransky, Paul O'Brien; for the Attendant, Ken, Howard—DanDesmond; for Juliet—Jennifer London; for Marty, Delivery Boy—Dan Desmond, Chuck Stransky.

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AN INTERVIEW

by

David Mamet

AN INTERVIEW

(AT RISE: A LAWYER and an ATTENDANT sitting in Hell.)

ATTORNEY. Well. Alright. Shall we begin? *(Pause.)* Mmm? No? *(Pause.)* What is the issue? *(Pause.)* Alright. Is, um, well, fine. I'll begin. Fine. Did, I, I *put* it to you: did I not serve others well.

ATTENDANT. ... did...

ATTORNEY. Yes. Did I not act *honorably,* and...

ATTENDANT. ... did.

ATTORNEY. ... I'm not finished.

ATTENDANT. Forgive me.

ATTORNEY. ... honorably, in the discharge of *all* duties *remotely* contained under the Laws Governing Agency.

(Pause.)

ATTENDANT. I'm afraid you'll have to expl...

ATTORNEY. ... did I not?

ATTENDANT. ... Did...

ATTORNEY. ... in all matters affecting the Welfare of Another.

ATTENDANT. ... waal...

ATTORNEY. ... excuse me, *which he had put in my charge.*

ATTENDANT. ... which he had put in your charge.

ATTORNEY. Yes. Professional, or personal, or...

(Pause.)

ATTENDANT. For example?
ATTORNEY. Well, well, they're not lacking.
ATTENDANT. Alright.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. An example?
ATTENDANT. Yes.
ATTORNEY. Alright. An Example--of acting in others' best interest. For example: Fine: A Loan.
ATTENDANT. A Loan. Of... ?
ATTORNEY. ... of... of... of. A loan, of: a *lawnmower.*
ATTENDANT. Alright.
ATTORNEY. ... When...
ATTENDANT. ... did someone actually loan you a lawnmower?
ATTORNEY. ... did they...
ATTENDANT. ... yes.
ATTORNEY. I'm sure they did. I..
ATTENDANT. ... can you... I don't mean to *antagonize* you...
ATTORNEY. Go on...
ATTENDANT. ... but...
ATTORNEY. Did they Loan Me a Lawnmower.
ATTENDANT. Yes.
ATTORNEY. ... in contradistinction to, to...
ATTENDANT. ... to your...
ATTORNEY. ... my, yes, my merely *hypothesizing* such a loan, as...

ATTENDANT. ... that's right.

ATTORNEY. ... an example of...

ATTENDANT. ... that's right.

ATTORNEY. ... a picturesque example of...

ATTENDANT. ... the "sort" of transaction...

ATTORNEY. ... yes. Yes. Yes. Did someone Loan Me a Lawnmower. *(Pause.)* I am prepared to... I don't know. I don't... wait. I don't know. I am prepared to *stipulate*, mmm? Whichever you...

ATTENDANT. ... I don't...

ATTORNEY ... that I *did,* or *didn't*...

ATTENDANT. ... didn't... ?

ATTORNEY. Borrow...

ATTENDANT. ... mmm?

ATTORNEY. You see?

ATTENDANT. No.

ATTORNEY. I am prepared to... whichever you,... *choose.* Do you see? Choose. Choose. Mm? I don't remember. *(Pause.)* I don't remember, *if, in, fact,*

ATTENDANT. ... but...

ATTORNEY. Yes. Alrig... yes. Fine. Alright. I *was* lent a lawnmower.

ATTENDANT. You were.

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. You were?

ATTORNEY. Yes. How about that. In my youth. It seems. I mowed "lawns" with it. Yes I did. I borrowed a neighbor's "lawnmower" on one occasion.

ATTENDANT. Why?

ATTORNEY. Well, it would have been mine was broken...

ATTENDANT. ...mmm...

ATTORNEY. ... and I'm sure that I returned it, in Better Shape--no, I won't be grandiose--in a state *as good as* that in which I'd found it. And I'll Tell You Why! That man, my Father's Friend, the man next door, from whom I'd borrowed it--isn't it strange what we recur to? As I *took* it, I told him. "I'll treat it like it was my own." And he said, "No. Treat it as if it's mine." Now: can I think that that comment didn't *influence* me? Over the Years...? And I cite the Very Fact that it was buried, to support my thesis.

(Pause.)

ATTENDANT. What was buried?

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. I'm sorry?

ATTENDANT. What was buried? *(Pause.)* The Lawnmower?

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. You're joking.

ATTENDANT. What?

ATTORNEY. You're joking.

ATTENDANT. No.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. ... was the lawnmower buried?

(Pause.)

ATTENDANT. Yes.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. ... you're joking. *(Pause.)* Who would bury a lawnmower? *(Pause.)* Do you see my point?

ATTENDANT. Who'd Bury a Lawnmower?

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. I don't know. *(Pause.)* Who *would* bury a lawnmower?

ATTORNEY. *(Pause.)* No one I know.

ATTENDANT. But you said that it was buried.

ATTORNEY. ... mm...

ATTENDANT. ... you said...

ATTORNEY. ... I said the *comment* was buried.

ATTENDANT. ... the comment.

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. What comment?

ATTORNEY. The "thing" the man said.

ATTENDANT. It was buried.

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. What do you mean?

ATTORNEY. ... it... I *forgot* about it.

ATTENDANT. Yes. I'm sorry. I've forgotten it, too. Could you...

ATTORNEY. He Said "treat it As If It Were Mine".

ATTENDANT. Yes. Yes. Yes. I'm... he lent you the lawnmower, and *you* said...

ATTORNEY. I said I'd treat it as if it were my own.

ATTENDANT. Yes.

ATTORNEY. And *he* said: "No. No. Treat it as if it were *mine*." *(Pause.)* "Mine", meaning "his".

ATTENDANT. It was his, though. *(Pause.)* It was his... wasn't it?

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. Alright. Yes. Alright. So. I see. He meant "Treat it With the Respect Which It Deserves."

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. He said that.

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. .. You forgot it.

ATTORNEY. No. Not *then.* MMM? I forgot it *subsequently.* I *didn't* forget it. I *suppressed* it. Mmm? As in *hydraulics* where the very act of the *suppression* causes it to rise, with greater *force.* You see? In my subconscious.

ATTENDANT. You, you , you found it profound that he asked you to treat his lawnmower with respect?

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. I had mouthed a *platitude*...

ATTENDANT. ... mmm?

ATTORNEY. And he suggested, through *wit,* that that which, to my infant mind, was *meaningful*, might be discarded in favor of a more mature philosophy.

ATTENDANT. He was suggesting that you treated your own gardening tools less-than-well? *(Pause.)* Was he?

ATTORNEY. Well, he may have been.

ATTENDANT. How did that make you feel?

ATTORNEY. I don't remember.

ATTENDANT. Can it have made you "proud"?

ATTORNEY. No, I can't think so, though...

ATTENDANT. ... or "Happy".

ATTORNEY. I... no, no, no, no, I see your point.

ATTENDANT. Perhaps it enraged you?

ATTORNEY. Yes. Yes. I see where you're...

ATTENDANT. ... and that is why you suppress it.

ATTORNEY. ...mmm.

ATTENDANT. ... and your whole business life has been the effort to repay that man for your humiliation.

ATTORNEY. Heh heh.

(Pause.)

ATTENDANT. Maybe you did bury the lawnmower.

ATTORNEY. "Maybe" I did, yes. But I didn't.

ATTENDANT. Why did you, alright, then, why did you say "maybe I did"?

ATTORNEY. I was agreeing with you.

ATTENDANT. Yes, but why...

ATTORNEY. ... I was agreeing with you... it's a "debating" device, if you will. To agree to the *lesser*... Abraham *Lincoln* did it. *Cicero* did it. To grant that which can not be successfully disputed, thereby gaining credibility, for those few objections one *may* fruitfully make.

ATTENDANT. Why could it not be successfully disputed?

ATTORNEY. Why, why could what not?

ATTENDANT. That you had buried the...

ATTORNEY. ... is that, now, is that what we were...

ATTENDANT. ... yes.

ATTORNEY. Refresh me.

ATTENDANT. I said "Maybe you buried the lawnmower", and you said as how you'd grant me that, as it could not be successfully disputed.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. Well. It could not.

ATTENDANT. Why?

ATTORNEY. ... because, because... How...

ATTENDANT. You could have said, "No, I didn't."

ATTORNEY. How would I prove it?

ATTENDANT. Are you suggesting that that which cannot be documented must be abjured?

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. Can't we drop it?

ATTENDANT. If you wish.

ATTORNEY. Thank you.

ATTENDANT. ... through you're the one that brought it up.

ATTORNEY. I'm aware of that.

ATTENDANT. ...n'I must suppose you raised it for a reason.

ATTORNEY. Yes, ah, well, no, there's no such thing as "Randomness", that the thing...?

ATTENDANT. How would I know? *(Pause.)* Hm. You were saying?

ATTORNEY. I'm sorry. Is there someone else I could talk to?

ATTENDANT. No.

ATTORNEY. I don't *mind*, do you see? Being treated, in the hackneyed phrase, "just like everybody else", in fact, had it been given me to choose I would have *requested* such treatment... that I *not* be granted special favors. And I am, in fact, *glad* that this is being conducted on a "level playing field". Mmm? Like the sons of the Rich, I would hate to feel that my *distinction* was owing to factors not of my control. Do you see, and, so, then, to suffer anxiety about whether my preferment was, in fact, deserved...

ATTENDANT. ... I'm listening.

ATTORNEY. I do not, as I said--nor is it given me, and, I must say, *nor do I feel that I require* preferment, preferential "treatment", or, or, or "grading on a Curve". Nor do I ask for such. Nor do I ask for such. But I must say that I feel that the, the, the, the *components* of the interchange, You and "I", in effect, that, it may be said "Are Not a Good Mix". ... where is the shame in that? And, so, I ask if I might, purely at random, do you see--I don't ask, and I *would* not ask, even if it were given to me, which it is not, and which is a situation I endorse, for the reasons--and think it specious of me, if you will, but I believe I've stated my position on them--I do not ask to, to "speak to your Superior", or any of that, "Hogwash". But I would like, at the risk of offending you--though why should I, for neither of us has done anything remotely construable as giving offense--I would like to be returned to the "pool", if you will, if such exists, and if I use the right term, to take my chances, being assigned randomly, as I assume it is done, and if it costs me a... *seniority* of any sort, so be it--to be assigned to another, well, if I may, to another interviewer. *(Pause.)* Might we... *(Pause)* Might we do that?

(Pause.)

ATTENDANT. No.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. Yes. I expected your response, and I endorse it. But: if I might state my reasons... mmm? No...? "I've Said Them"? Hm. Alright. Good. Fine. Well, fine. I've said it, and it "clears the Air". And one lesson of business, I feel, and it is in divergence from the most Accepted Belief, and, perhaps, for that *reason* has served me so well--it's founded not on *theory*, but on observation is: It Is Not Necessary To Be Liked. *(Pause.)* That may be heresy to you, I know it was to many in my field. I presume that it conjures images of disgraceful behavior; of *discourtesy.* Of *"rudeness"*. But I put it to you: may not an *antipathy* occur from organic and *legitimately* differentiating interests? Of *course* it can. In business...--what is business but the bringing together of dissimilar, or of *apparently* dissimilar mm...? What? Goals. Is it essential that two parties...

ATTENDANT. No, you've lost me.

ATTORNEY. What?

ATTENDANT. You've lost me.

ATTORNEY. I was saying... *(Pause.)* Where did you... Where did I lose you...?

ATTENDANT. At the beginning.

ATTORNEY. ... the beginning.

ATTENDANT. Yes.

ATTORNEY. Of what?

ATTENDANT. Of the whole thing.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. ... I...

ATTENDANT. Why did you bury the lawnmower?

ATTORNEY. *Fine.* I'd like to... "recast" my remarks. May I do that?

ATTENDANT. I don't know what you mean.

ATTORNEY. I'd like to... to "recast", to "re-*state*" my, in answer to your question, I would like to...

ATTENDANT. ... what question...?

ATTORNEY. You asked me... you asked me... you... you aren't going to help me.

ATTENDANT. *(Pause.)* No.

ATTORNEY. You asked me, you suggested that I *may* have buried the lawnmower.

ATTENDANT. Yes.

ATTORNEY. And I agreed.

ATTENDANT. Mm.

ATTORNEY. No, alright, and Why Would I have Agreed, had I *not,* in fact, done that Heinous Thing.

ATTENDANT. Yes.

ATTORNEY. That's your Question.

ATTENDANT. That's one of them.

ATTORNEY. Heh heh. Then we're going to be here awhile. Is that it? *(Pause.)* Is that it? Is that the thing? We're going to be here a wee while, and can go "nowhere" until we dispose of this point. Is that the thing? I've brought it up, and, so, it, what, we have to, is that the thing?

ATTENDANT. Yes.

ATTORNEY. Thanks for your candor. That's it. Let me ask you: what *weight*, then , does the assertion have?

ATTENDANT. That you buried the lawnmower?

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. What weight?

ATTORNEY. If it were to be proved.

ATTENDANT. How could one prove it?

ATTORNEY. Mmm. Quite. If I *admitted* it...?

ATTENDANT. Is it true?

ATTORNEY. Let's just, for a second, say, that, under certain circumstances, I might *say* that it's true.

ATTENDANT. Why?

ATTORNEY. To "move this Thing Along". Eh?

ATTENDANT. You'd swear to what was false?

ATTORNEY. I'd...

ATTENDANT. ... you'd...

ATTORNEY. I'd "fib", alright? I'd "fib". You're going to tell me that you don't know what a "fib" is? It's a "lie", alright...? It's a "White Lie"... a "white Lie is a Lie", yes. Alright. Yes, yes, yes, yes, and I'm suggesting that I'd do it. What a Bad Man. What a Bad Bad Man. No. Never seen his like. What a Tale for the Boys at the Club. What a sad reminiscence for the odd Commemorative Banquet. "I cannot discharge from my mind the instance, singular, in all my service, of a man, I can not couch it so's to Spare your Feelings... but... He Told a Fib" *(Pause.) HA? (Pause.) HA? (Pause.)*... Oh, the hell with it. I buried the Lawnmower.

ATTENDANT. Next Case.

ATTORNEY. Let me retrace my steps a moment. We live in a World of Norms. It may be unfortunate, but it is so. I feel we always have. That norm once supplied by the Church is gone... "If you act Otherwise than As God Wills it, you are Lost". That's gone. But let's examine it a moment, if we might.

... I shun the philosophic argument, and proceed to the social... That Person who ignored the dictates of the Church did so at immediate risk of social ostracism--leaving, as I say, the question of perpetual, et cetera--Now: that Norm's Vanished, but, but... Mass *Media,* do you see, *supplant* it. We are not *told* of Salvation, but *shown* it, and Not To Live Up To That Norm, brings not *guilt*, no. Not *Guilt*, but *Anxiety.* We strive, therefore, to live up to that Norm. Not to do so is to court Anguish. No, I don't think that's too strong a word... this *second,* where was I...?

ATTENDANT. ... I don't know.

ATTORNEY. ... two norms. Alright? Social Behavior. Standards. ... all founded, whether the *Church,* or the Lines of a New Car, on--though they may *contain* truth, on, on an *arbitrary*, for what is truth?

ATTENDANT. ... what is truth?

ATTORNEY. Yes.

ATTENDANT. What?

ATTORNEY. "What is truth"?

ATTENDANT. Yes.

ATTORNEY. What?

ATTENDANT. Who knows.

ATTORNEY. "Who knows what 'truth' is?"

ATTENDANT. Yes.

ATTORNEY. Who?

ATTENDANT. Who? I don't know. You brought it up.

ATTORNEY. Alright. Is there such a "thing" as Truth? *If* there is Such a Thing as Truth... you see, I say "If", if there is such a thing. If truth exists, then, in truth, I know the truest thing I know is this: I never buried a lawnmower. *(Pause.)* I may have done *other* things. I'm sure that I did. I did things I

regret, I will go so far, make of it what you will, as to inform you I did things which I despise. Which of us hasn't? Does that excuse them? No. Exonerate me? No. Not at all. I did them, I own up to them, if you would like to know what they are, ask me, and I will enumerate them. Does the urge to excuse myself render me corrupt? I do not *wish* to excuse myself. I wish, being human, to "present" myself, "warts And All". *Both* the good and the bad, and to receive fair, if I may, impartial, what, "enlightened"--if that falls to my lot--consideration. Am I willing to be educated? Yes. Am I willing to fawn, no. *(Pause.)* No. I am not. Ask me why, I can't tell you, save that I'm a man. I confess it. I lived, I sinned, I am not perfect. The list of my sins, if compiled...

ATTENDANT. Why did you bury the lawnmower?

ATTORNEY. I did *not* bury it.

ATTENDANT. Who did?

ATTORNEY. Who did? *No* one.

(Pause.)

ATTENDANT. How do you know?

ATTORNEY. Because I was there.

ATTENDANT. You were there. When?

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. Alright. *(Pause.)* Alright. Fine. Fine. I buried the lawnmower. How Bad is That? I buried it. I did it, I'm guilty, put it down to my account. I buried it. I did it. Fine. Fine. "Rot in Hell". It can't be worse than this. I buried the lawnmower. *(Pause.)* I stole. *(Pause.)* I... *(Pause.)* I... I subverted the Judiciary. I misused my client's funds. *(Pause.)* I suborned

perjury. I screwed little Dot Callahan, and left town. I don't even know if she got Pregnant. That's not the lot, but that's the tone of the thing. Eh? May I go now. Whatever the thing is. Fine. May I go?

ATTENDANT. Yes.

(ATTENDANT scribbles on a pad. Hands it to the ATTORNEY.)

ATTORNEY. *(Reads.)* "Eternity in Hell, bathed in burning white phosphorous, while listening to a Symphonic Tone Poem." Because of the Things I Had Done. Such a bad man. Fine. Just, just for my edification. What *particularly,* mm? Cause it looks to me like a Kangaroo Court. Mm? To what do I owe this sentence? Pray, what are they?

ATTENDANT. Two things. Either in itself, excusable. Both, in conjunction, requiring the punishment in Hell: You passed the Bar, *(Pause.)* and you neglected to live forever.

(Pause.)

ATTORNEY. You know, prejudice is a terrible thing. It can take many forms. Sexual, Racial, or, it seems, professional. I would not have thought it, but here you are prepared to damn a man because of supposed attributes of a profession to which he belongs. That's wrong. That's just wrong. Are you saying there are no honest lawyers? *(Pause.)* "No comment?"

ATTENDANT. Name me one.

ATTORNEY. Well, I'll tell you what. Are you a sporting man? I'll name you one. I will name you an honest lawyer. Mm? And then you apologize to me. And you set me free.

What do you say to that?

ATTENDANT. Go ahead.

ATTORNEY. How much time do I have?

ATTENDANT. We hope that you'll like it here.

END OF PLAY

COSTUME PLOT

ATTORNEY
- 3 Piece charcoal gray suit with suspenders
- Striped shirt w/French cuffs
- Silver and gold "A" cufflinks
- Silver and gold faux Rolex
- Yellow and red tie
- White carnation
- Black socks w/ribbing
- Black leather wingtip shoes
- Polo athletic T-shirts (under all)

ATTENDANT
- Black two piece suit
- Fray rigged shirt
- Maroon vest
- Black leather belt
- Plain black socks
- Black toe-cap shoes
- Toupee

PROPERTY PLOT

KILL RUNNING LIGHTS

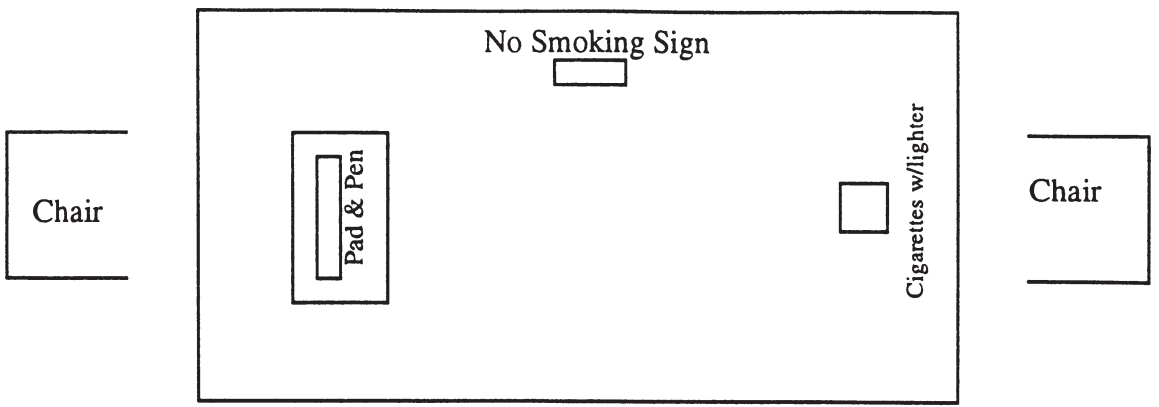
Table with Drawer
- Props Inside Desk Drawer:
  - Ashtray
  - Wet Rag
  - Spare Lighter
  - Spare Pack of Cigarettes
  - 1 Pad Paper: 8 1/2 x 11 for *HOTLINE*
  - 1 Pencil for *HOTLINE*

2 Chairs
"NO SMOKING" Siogn
1 Pad of Paper
1 Pen
1 Pack Cigarettes on Table
1 Gold Lighter on Table

Stage Right

AN INTERVIEW

Stage Left



HOTLINE

by

Elaine May

HOTLINE
TRANSCRIPTION FROM TAPE

The tape that precedes *Hotline* (The transcript of which is included here.) is only used when *Death Defying Acts* is presented in its entirety. It is played in the dark during the set change and its purpose is to make clear to the audience that it is not part of the first play. —*Elaine May*

(Phone rings.)

1ST VOICE. Hotline

(Phone rings.)

2ND VOICE. Hotline.

(Phone rings.)

3RD VOICE. Hotline.

WOMAN'S VOICE #1. I'd like to talk to a counselor.

MALE COUNSELOR'S VOICE #1. Tell me what's upsetting you.

WOMAN'S VOICE #1. I just... I just don't see the point of anything.

(Phone rings.)

HISPANIC MALE VOICE. Hello... Is there someone there I can talk to?

MALE COUNSELOR'S VOICE #2. Yes, yes, I'm a counselor.

HISPANIC MALE VOICE. Well... I'm very upset.

MALE COUNSELOR'S VOICE #2. That's okay. Tell me about it.

(Phone rings.)

WOMAN'S VOICE. *(ADELE COOMBS.)* Is Adam there?

COUNSELOR'S VOICE. *(ADAM.)* Hi, Mrs. Coombs. This is Adam.

WOMAN'S VOICE. *(ADELE COOMBS.)* Adam? Oh, I'm so glad I got your phone. I'm going to do it again, Adam.

COUNSELOR'S VOICE. *(ADAM.)* Well, let's talk about it, Adele.

(Phone rings.)

FEMALE COUNSELOR'S VOICE. Hotline

ENGLISHMAN'S VOICE. Yes, I'd like to talk to someone about oral sex.

FEMALE COUNSELOR'S VOICE. What?

ENGLISHMAN'S VOICE. Oral sex.

FEMALE COUNSELOR'S VOICE. We're not that kind of hot line.

ENGLISHMAN'S VOICE. I'm sorry. I'm afraid someone has played a very cruel joke on me.

(Phone rings.)

1ST VOICE. Hotline

(Phone Rings.)

2ND VOICE. Hotline

(Phone rings.)

END OF TAPE

HOTLINE

(The stage is divided in half. Stage right is concealed by a closed slider panel. Stage left angles off into the wings as if it is part of a larger space.)

(KEN GARDNER is at a table L staring, anxiously, at two phones that sit side by side. The sound of muted voices, ringing phones, and moving shadows offstage give the impression that there are others at similar tables, answering similar phones.)

1ST VOICE. You must feel terrible, Linda. Would you like to tell me what's wrong?...

2ND VOICE. Hot line. ... I see. Why don't you tell me what's wrong?...

3RD VOICE. Hot line. ... Yes, I am. ... Well, that's what I'm here for. Tell me about it...

(KEN glances toward the voices, then adjusts his two phones so that they are exactly even. A middle-aged man in a suit enters behind him. He is Dr. Russell, the supervising psychologist.)

DR. RUSSELL. How's it going, Ken?

KEN. *(Whirling around.)* Oh! Dr. Russell. You startled me.

DR. RUSSELL. *(Chuckling.)* Scared the hell out of you is

what you mean. Let's say what we mean, Ken. If we're going to help others get in touch with their feelings we have to be honest about our own.

KEN. Right. *(Suddenly.)* And I'll tell you something else that's crazy. My phones haven't rung. And I feel it's because they know it's me. I feel they've *decided* to ring for the others because they know they're better at this than I am. I mean, I *know* it's insane and phones are electrical instruments...

DR. RUSSELL. That's fine, Ken. Be aware of that feeling. Of course, it's not a feeling you'll want to share with a disturbed person. But there can be a lot of resentment when you're talking to someone bent on self-destruction. Recognize it. *(He claps KEN on the back.)* Then keep it to yourself.

KEN. *(Calling after him.)* Dr. Russell! Do you think... would it be possible for someone to sit with me for the first couple of calls? In case I run into something over my head...

DR. RUSSELL. We're all in over our heads here, Ken. Just remember your Schneidman, your training, your seminars, and then follow your instincts.

KEN. Just... just for the first call? You see... I've never actually dealt with another human being in trouble. I mean, the... simulated situations are close, but these are real people. I mean... someone may actually live or die because of what I say on the phone.

DR. RUSSELL. If you feel that way, Ken, this is not the job for you.

KEN. *(Quickly.)* Right. I mustn't be arrogant.

DR. RUSSELL. Remember that what these people want most is someone to talk to, they want help, otherwise they wouldn't be calling. I'm not going to tell you that a rebuff or harsh treatment couldn't push someone over the edge. But

they're not going to get that from you, Ken, because you're a trained counselor and an intuitive, intelligent human being. But you're not God.

KEN. Right. Thank you, Dr. Russell.

(DR. RUSSELL claps him on the shoulder again and walks off. KEN sits staring down at his phones. A 2nd counselor, MARTY, steps out of the shadows and speaks to him.)

MARTY. He's a great guy, isn't he, Russell? Sometimes when I get into something really messy I can hear his voice guiding me.

KEN. Yes... Were you this nervous before the first call?

MARTY. Oh, sure. Listen, we all were. But half the trick is just answering "Hot Line". I don't know why but it opens them right up, makes them feel safe. I don't know why...

(One of the phones on KEN'S desk suddenly lights up and begins ringing. KEN jumps, then stares at it, then picks it up.)

KEN. *(Into phone.)* Hot line. ... That's right. ... That's what I'm here for. Tell me what's wrong.

(DR. RUSSELL walks on behind KEN and stands quietly listening.)

KEN. Where are you now Eddie? ... I see. Well, if you come in off the ledge I think we'll be able to hear each other better. ... Well, I'll tell you what, why don't you climb back in through the window and I'll keep talking, so you'll know I'm

still on the line and you don't have to answer, okay?... What would you like me to say? ... Anything? Okay. Let's ... give it a try. *(Raising his voice, slightly.)* ... My name is Ken Gardner and I'm sitting in a room that's about 14 by 25, and I'm behind a table that's about 2 by 4 and I'm talking to you, and I'm going to keep on talking to you while you climb back through the window--very carefully--because I'd like to talk to you after you get inside and find out what's troubling you... and you don't have to rush, Eddie, you can go back through the window, very slowly and carefully, because I'm going to be here, Eddie, talking to you for as long as it takes, so just... *(His voice suddenly returns to normal.)* ... Hello, to you. ... Well, good. I feel much better now, too. *(He chuckles.)* ... No, that's alright, you rest. That's a good idea. It's exhausting to do what you just did. ... No, no, you call me back whenever you feel like it. I'll be here all night. And I'm proud of you, Eddie.

(He hangs up. MARTY and DR. RUSSELL burst into applause... then Dr. Russell makes an "O" with his thumb and forefinger and goes off.)

MARTY. You did great.

KEN. *(Awed.)* I saved a life.

MARTY. It's a great feeling, isn't it?

KEN. I've never felt anything like this before.

MARTY. There's nothing like it. I've worked in drug centers, I've worked with battered wives...

KEN. It's a *great* feeling!

MARTY. ... but these people are so vulnerable. It tears your heart out.

(The lights fade up on DOROTHY R, who sits, motionless, staring into a hand mirror as the right panel opens.)

KEN. Yes! That's it. The vulnerability. I loved that guy. I've never felt so close to anyone... in... in just that way. He was so lost. And I was all he had. I was *it.*

MARTY. Yes.

KEN. *They're* the ones who are nervous. So scared you'll smash their last little hope...

DOROTHY. *(Into the mirror.)* What the fuck are *you* looking at.

KEN. ... so timid and... grateful.

(The lights go out on KEN and MARTY and the left panel closes.)

(DOROTHY puts the mirror down, empties a bottle of pills into a glass bowl, pours a glass of water, then picks up the phone and dials 411. The lights come back up stage L as she dials and the left panel opens part way, revealing KEN on the phone, speaking with much more ease and a certain authority.)

KEN. ... what would you *like* to hear me say, Hal?...

DOROTHY. *(Into phone.)* I'd like the telephone number of The Suicide Center. ... In Manhattan. ... There's more than one suicide center? In Manhattan? ... Well, which one is actually called The Suicide Center?

KEN. ... I don't think you're a bad person, Hal.

DOROTHY. I don't understand. You mean there are five suicide centers in Manhattan and none of them is called The

Suicide Center? ... No, no, listen. I want the main suicide center. It would be an emergency listing--like the Fire station. ... Right.

KEN. ... No, I don't think that's evil, Hal. Just human.

DOROTHY. ... Well, are all five of them listed the same way? ... Then you're not checking right. Listen, operator, this is a very special listing, you follow? This is for morte. Yo morte. So you go now, and look for the number of The Suicide Center, not "A" Suicide Center because "The" is part of the name. "El". El center por yo morte.

KEN. ... Well, maybe she was upset, too. You know, small things can look awfully big when they all come at the same time.

DOROTHY. ... No, that's not it, operator. ... You've checked *every* emergency listing? ... So what you're telling me is that in all of Manhattan the only place officially listed as The Suicide Center is a coffee house. ... Fine. Thank you. Can I speak to someone who isn't Spanish.

KEN. ... I'll be here all night, Hal, so if you start feeling bad again you just call me. My name is Ken, and I'll be here for you. *(He chuckles.)* ... Okay, Hal, you, too.

(KEN hands up and leans back, contentedly, as the lights fade out and the stage left slider closes.)

DOROTHY. *(Into phone.)* ... Yes, you can. I've been trying to get the telephone number of The Suicide Center from one of your operators who can barely speak English and who has informed me that out of the dozens of suicide centers now lining Manhattan the only one called The Suicide Center is a coffee house. Now, I go through this shit almost every time I call Information but I usually let it pass because I go through

so much shit every time I do anything that I hate to single out one special group. But this is an emergency. This is the kind of thing where if you don't get a number you can die. And I don't think you people should hire Information operators who will be handling life and death emergency cases unless they have some grasp of the language of your customers. ... Yes, you can. I want the telephone number of The Suicide Center. In Manhattan. ... Hello? ... Oh, sorry. I thought you were gone.

(There is a knock on the door.)

VOICE. *(Calling.)* Burger shop!

DOROTHY. Oh, shit. *(Calling.)* Just a minute. *(Into phone.)* ... It's an emergency listing. Like a Fire Station. ... No, it would be called The Suicide Center. Listen, who is this? Are you the same operator I just talked to pretending not to have an accent? ... Well, I don't believe this. You mean you don't have one listing for The Suicide Center? ... Where is that? ... No, that's the number I just got. That's the coffee house.

VOICE. *(Calling.)* Burger shop!

DOROTHY. *(Calling.)* Wait a minute, will you? I'm on the phone. *(Into phone.)* Well, who would know. Who do you suggest I call now that Information is stumped. ... Is that 911? ... The Police Emergency number--is that 911?

VOICE. *(Calling.)* Should I come back with this?

DOROTHY. *(Calling.)* Will you wait a fucking minute! *(Into phone.)* ... 911? ... The Police Emergency is 911?... Thank you, you moron.

(DOROTHY hangs up, dials 911. We hear the faint sound of a busy signal. There is another knock.)

DOROTHY. Shit! Hold on! Fuck. Just a second.

(She hangs up, dials "0", then, still carrying the phone, she goes to the door, unlocks it, and opens it. A Delivery Man stands there with a bag.)

DOROTHY. How much is it? *(Into phone.)* Operator, I wonder if you can help me. I just dialed 911 for Police Emergency and I got a busy signal. ... Yes, I know that means it's busy. I wondered if you could break in on the conversation for me. This is an emergency. *(She picks up her purse from a table as she speaks.)* But they're not all as *much* of an emergency. ... No, we can't know that. Thank you. Your simple wisdom has saved me from doing a very selfish thing. *(She hangs up and dials 911 again. There is the faint sound of ringing; to the Delivery Man.)* How much is that?

DELIVERY MAN. Seven-fifty.

DOROTHY. For a hamburger?

DELIVERY MAN. And coffee. You got coffee, too.

(DOROTHY fishes in her purse, the phone still to her ear, takes out bills and change and counts them into his hand.)

DOROTHY. ... that's three... four... four-twenty... four-thirty-five... *(Into phone.)* Answer, you bastards! *(To DELIVERY MAN.)* How much did I give you so far?

DELIVERY MAN. Four-thirty-five.

DOROTHY. Four-thirty-five? And I owe you seven-fifty... so seven-fifty minus four-thirty-five is...

DELIVERY MAN. Three-fifteen.

DOROTHY. *(Counting it into his hand.)* ... and another

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